



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 667.12 Lec 01

Topics in Philosophy of Science: Issues in the Historical Sciences.

Winter Term 2016

Course Outline

Lectures: Monday 5 – 7.45, Social Sciences Building, Room 006

Instructor: Adrian Currie
Office: SS1210
Office Phone: (403) 220-4344
Email: Adrian.currie@ucalgary.ca
Office Hours: Monday 12-2

Course Description

Some scientists investigate the deep past: how did the universe begin, the solar-system form, and life emerge? What explains life's diversity, major events in its history, and the emergence and subsequent success of homo sapiens? In answering such questions, scientists engage in activities which take them well outside what philosophers of science are used to. Theories are often vague, ambiguous or non-existent, experiments of limited value, data is often highly biased and incomplete. And yet, historical scientists have met with great success. We will examine these sciences and try to explain how and why they work.

As philosophical issues in the historical sciences are so underexplored, the course will have an emphasis on students (and the class as a whole) navigating unfamiliar territory collaboratively. Which philosophical aspects we will cover: issues of evidence, explanation, objectivity, metaphysics (realism, for instance), or even sociological concerns, will depend upon such collaboration.

Required Texts

N/A: all course content will be provided on D2L

Course Requirements

There will be no final exam. All assignments to be handed in via D2L (except questions, see below). Late submissions will lose 5% of that submission's grade per business day (unless there are extenuating circumstances).

Field Trip

On the 17th of January there will be a fieldtrip to the Royal Tyrell Museum. The event is free and transport is arranged from campus. The event is not mandatory but is strongly encouraged.

Questions

Students are required to provide (by email) 2 questions (of no more than 3 sentences each) pertaining to the weekly reading by no later than midnight of the Friday before that week's class. To pass the course, students must provide 10 sets of such questions.

Presentations – 15%, dates TBA

Early in the course, students will each present for up to 10 minutes, followed by a 5 minute question and answer session. The topic of the presentation will be a scientific case study chosen by the student, in particular for its capacity to illustrate some issue relevant to the course. Assessment will be based on clarity of presentation, appropriateness of topic, and response to questions.

Short Writing Piece – 30% Due: 14th March

Using a case study, write a response to one of the blog posts on *Extinct* of no more than 1.5k words. Grading will be according to Structure, Content & Analysis (see below).

Essay Draft – 10% Due: 11th April

Students will work with Adrian to craft an individual essay question relevant to the course. These must be agreed upon by the 28th of March. By the 11th of April a *full draft* (that is, not a sketch or an outline) must be provided. Your grade will depend on the potential and completeness of the draft.

Essay – 45% Due 25th April

Write an essay of up to 5k words based on the comments you received on your essay draft. You will be marked along the following lines, in addition to how well you revised your essay in light of the previous comments.

Structure

The essay must follow standard essay structure, including an introduction and conclusion. To do well ensure sure your writing is well formed and organized so the reader can follow you. Avoid tangents, tangled sentences and long windedness. A good structure will also be convincing: does the argument of the essay flow and does it all relate to the question at hand?

Content

Have you demonstrated an understanding of the philosophical material in the course? Doing well involves clearly describing course content pertinent to the question you are asking clearly and succinctly.

Reflection & Analysis

This marks turns on how much you have engaged with the philosophical material in the course. You must take a position on the question. This need not be an extreme position (often with limited space defending something extreme is very difficult!) It is important that your essay does not simply describe the debate – it must argue for a position in it. A good mark involves taking a position, providing reasons for accepting that position, and considering (and responding to) possible objections to the argument.

Letter Grade Conversion Table

A+	96–100 %	B+	80-85.9 %	C+	67-69.9 %	D+	55-59.9 %
A	91-95.9 %	B	75-79.9 %	C	64-66.9 %	D	50-54.9 %
A-	86-90.9 %	B-	70-74.9 %	C-	60-63.9 %	F	0- 49.9 %

Academic Honesty

Cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as an extremely serious academic offence, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment, an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw from the University. See the relevant sections on 'Academic Misconduct' in the current University Calendar. Intellectual honesty requires that your work include adequate referencing to sources. Plagiarism occurs when you do not acknowledge or correctly reference your sources. If you have questions about correct referencing, consult your instructor.

Academic Accommodation

Student's seeking an accommodation based on disability or medical concerns should contact Student Accessibility Services. SAS will process the request and issue letters of accommodation to instructors. For more information on support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, visit <http://www.ucalgary.ca/access/>. Students who require accommodation in relation to their coursework based on a protected ground other than disability should communicate this need in writing to their instructor. The full policy on student accommodations is available at http://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/student-accommodation-policy_0.pdf

